

# Bringing Knowledge to Life in Macomb County

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Michigan State University Extension helps people improve their lives through an educational process that applies knowledge to critical issues, needs and opportunities. Extension offices in counties throughout the state link the research of the state's land grant university, MSU, with the issues of concern in local communities. Extension provides information and offers educational programs in agriculture and natural resources, youth and families, community and economic development. Local citizens serving on the county Extension council regularly help select current focus areas for programming.



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## Focus Areas for Extension Programming

Building Healthy Families	Helping Youth Succeed
Building Healthy Communities	Healthy Economic Development
Healthy Environment	

## Improved Health Through Increased Access to Produce

MSU Extension (MSUE) collaborates with organizations in Macomb County to educate citizens about improving their health through increased produce consumption. *Plant a Parcel for the Hungry* and *Project Fresh* (PF) are results of two such collaborations.

MSUE and Forgotten Harvest, a non-profit food surplus collection and distribution organization, team up for *Plant a Parcel for the Hungry* to provide hunger relief to residents of Macomb. In 2003, 25 Macomb produce growers donated over 15 tons of fresh produce from their farms or through the Mt. Clemens Farmers Market. Extension linked with Macomb growers to help account for a 730 percent increase in donations over the 2002 season. Beyond assisting those in need, the growers themselves can benefit by listing their donation as a tax credit.

Equally as important is the *Project Fresh* partnership between MSUE and Michigan Department of Community Health's Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC). MSUE educates WIC clients about the health benefits of daily produce consumption. Participants receive \$20 in coupons to purchase produce at local farmers markets and improve their diets. Growers profit from increased business.

In 2003, a statewide survey of PF participants indicated that:

- 63 percent consumed more fruits and vegetables as a result of PF.
- 73 percent planned to continue those eating habits through the year.
- 91 percent wished to continue in the program this summer.

Over 1350 Macomb families redeemed \$17,486 worth of PF coupons in 2003. This is a 73.29 percent coupon redemption rate (statewide rate: 70 percent). Macomb MSUE continues to provide innovative educational opportunities and partnerships to improve families' nutrition and economic health. *Contact: Eileen Haraminac and Hannah Stevens*

## Students Adopt Conservation Practices at an Earlier Age

MSUE's Water Conservation Program educates first and second grade students in water basics. Through hands-on activities, visuals and games, students learn about the Earth's water, the water cycle, how water enters and leaves their homes and water uses and conservation. The program is designed to help students understand the importance of conserving water.

One popular activity, "The Water Race," demonstrates the effects of over-using water resources—students discover that people and nature are both losers in the race. The program also examines water-saving and -wasting actions.

In a sample of the evaluation surveys returned by teachers, 53 percent indicated changes in classroom water use. Students:

- Reduced water use while washing hands,
- Checked that taps were turned off,
- Reported dripping faucets.

One teacher reported that students wrote letters on conservation to local government officials.

To extend this education further, conservation-related homework activities are provided in the teachers' packets. These activities include a discussion about the family's water use and tracking water use in the home.

- Forty percent of teachers using these take-home activities reported students changing water use at home.
- Students turned the water off while brushing teeth and took showers rather than baths.

According to one teacher, "Several students turn their water off while brushing teeth and washing hands. Some parents insist on short showers!"

Through the 2002-03 and 03-04 school years, MSUE educated over 12,550 students from over 80 Macomb County schools. This conservation program is one of Macomb MSUE's increasingly popular school programs.

Contact: Mary Gerstenberger

## Citizens Help by Sharing Their Opinions

MSU campus and Macomb MSUE staff partnered with eight northern county communities to conduct the Northern Macomb Citizen Opinion Survey. The survey focused on growth and the use of land and natural resources. Survey goals included:

1. Providing communities with specific, relevant information for current and future planning;
2. Facilitating multi-community planning and communication across local boundary lines.

This survey was mailed to 5600 residents in 10 communities. Over 41 percent of residents responded with opinions about growth, development, the environment, funding priorities and future planning activities. A comprehensive, 10-community survey report was compiled, as well as separate reports organized by "community".

Through this collaborative effort, citizens, planning commissioners and elected officials were given data that identified residents' preferences for their community's vision. Citizens were able to recognize the complexity of issues facing their community and supported (85 percent) coordinated planning among neighboring units of government. Further, almost 50 percent of residents in all communities identified a "lack of understanding of land use issues" as a major barrier to effective land use in their community.

A year after releasing the reports, public officials and planning commission members reflected on the use of the report. As a result of the survey:

- Six communities used the information in updating their Master Plan.
- Data has been used for project decision-making and trend identification (60 percent found the results to be *useful* or *very useful*).
- Officials collected valuable resident input for the entire northern area of Macomb.

The survey was a successful collaboration, exemplifying MSUE's mission to utilize MSU's research expertise in addressing local issues and identifying residents' educational needs. Reports are available at: [macombcountymi.gov/msuextension](http://macombcountymi.gov/msuextension)

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